

Magazine Feature Section

MOTION PICTURE PRODUCERS BEGIN FIGHT AGAINST ARBITRARY CENSORS

Some Companies Use the Screen in Appeal Against the Boards that Cut Films Which Are O.K.'d Elsewhere

THE question of censorship each day becomes more serious to the motion-picture producers. That it has reached the point where something will have to be done—either the establishment of a federal board and the elimination of the state censors—is evidenced by the bitter fight many of the producing companies are making.

Not infrequently in the motion-picture theaters will occur a scene in which the father or husband, rescued from death, will clasp his baby daughter, or his wife or his sister in his arms. Then will flash upon the scene the following bit of sarcasm:

Permitted by the Censors

And the faintest suggestion of a kiss, which immediately fades into darkness, will be shown. So quickly is the kiss made, and so artfully has the producer brought home to the public the ridiculous prudery of some censors by immediately covering up the most innocent of kisses with a blank, black space, that one cannot but help feel the anger which the producer harbored while doing it.

The Balboa Company attaches a trailer to their pictures which reads:

"Free speech, free press and a free stage have always been ideals of the American people. Then why not a free screen? Our constitution's most sacred guarantee is freedom of expression. When censorship or any form of it is legalized here, then will begin the end of our democracy."

The Balboa Company says further: "This statement is intended to present the whole censorship controversy to motion-picture spectators in its true light. If it is established the spectators will suffer more than the producers. Hence, the associated picture makers have decided to put the issue squarely to the people in this manner. It is for them to say if they want their amusements censored or not."

Censorship is one of the most aggravating influences the builders of a great industry ever had to deal with. The question of submitting every film made to the opinion of a small body of men and women, to be judged and measured by the personal opinions of these few individuals, has arisen like a specter on the horizon

of one of the largest and most beneficent industries the world has ever seen. It is already seriously hampering the broad and democratic development of the art, and producers declare if the question is not put aside or solved in a sensible manner, there is grave danger that film making will be crippled; indeed, many producers claim that actual ruin is staring them in the face.

If a hundred photo plays were taken at random and compared with a hundred regular stage plays, or a hundred vaudeville acts, the balance will be found to be decidedly in favor of the photo play, when morality and good taste are considered.

Most of the operas are based on crime and immorality, and people of culture and refinement all over the world consider grand opera the highest form of entertainment. Many of the stage successes of today are far below the moral standard of the worst picture plays made, but not a thing is said about censoring them.

Vaudeville, with double-meaning jokes, musical comedy of the few clothes variety, are shown daily and nightly on the stages of the best theaters, and not a hand or voice is raised in protest.

Censors of moving pictures have barred that old standby, Ten Nights in a Barroom, because of the number of gin mill scenes, yet this play has been presented thousands of times on the regular stage and by temperance societies and in churches. The censors of Kansas will not allow the Birth of a Nation, which is adapted from The Glenside, a speaking stage play, to be shown in the state.

Is it worse to look upon the pictured scenes of a play than to have the same thing set up and acted out with the addition of the performers' voices to make it doubly harmful, if there is any harm?

Many states have enacted drastic censorship laws for motion pictures, and, in addition to this, are many local boards and a great host of self-appointed keepers of the public morals working without official sanction. Few of these people ever agree on what should be and what should not be eliminated from pictures. What the Censor Board of one city or town will pass unchallenged will be viewed with horror by the next board that applies its rules to the picture.

One of the paid censors of Ohio expressed her delight in the comedy police pictures, and the police official on whose shoulders rested the weighty duty of deciding what should be shown in the picture-show houses of Chicago suppressed all pictures where a comedy policeman was shown in a ridiculous position, although the characters of the officers of the law were so plainly burlesqued that no one could see anything that would tend to ridicule uniformed authority.

The operation of the Censorship Board subject all films to inspection, the good and the bad are all judged, and always for a fee, and the innocent are assessed just as much for being declared good as the guilty are charged for being declared wicked.

The ruling of one board is seldom accepted by another. It is said that the censors in

GRACIOUS! THE LADY IS ACTUALLY TYING HER SHOE LACE! - THEY WOULD BE ASKING ME, WHO TOOK THE SENSE OUT OF CENSOR!



As the producer sees the arbitrary censor.

Pennsylvania objected to a news picture of a statue being moved, because the workmen placed a rope around the bronze to swing it to its new position—under the censorship laws that prohibit scenes in pictures of hangings.

Many of the film makers themselves are in favor of logical censorship. Indeed, they have themselves maintained the National Board of Censorship for years, for the purpose of creating a standard and keeping bad pictures out of the market.

Most of the producers consider this sufficient. Others, believing that censorship of some sort is inevitable, favor a board under the control of the Federal Government, with the belief that this would subject the films to but one examination, and eliminate the many state and local boards, which cause great delay and expense.

The majority of producers are opposed to censorship of any kind, and claim that the public should be its own judge. Just the same as

it is its own judge as to the kind of books they read.

Below are the opinions of two men who speak with authority—one a producer, and the other a critic and authority on pictures. W. Stephen Bush, editor of the Moving Picture World, who is opposed to any censorship, says:

"Giving all due credit to the right motives of those who are advocating and even clamoring for censorship of moving pictures, one only has to discuss the question with a very few

to discover that underneath it all there is not a little of the self-righteous spirit. A little further consideration will develop the fact that the ideas and convictions of no two individuals on all subjects will ever be found to coincide. "All our educators today are devoting more and still more time and attention to the development of the individual and are realizing that the best system is the one that adapts itself most fully to the peculiar mentality of each unit in the class."

"By what line of argument can it be shown that the development of the enormous moving picture industry should be placed in the hands of a few officially appointed censors, to be measured by their individual yardstick? Who is there in this country or in any other country that is sufficiently free from prejudices and personal likes and dislikes, whose mental and spiritual outlook is so broad and infinite—whose artistic and moral sense is sufficiently developed, to be made the sponsor for the individual tastes of one hundred million Americans? And if there were such an individual, would the proper amusement standards of the people of this country be more likely to develop without the exercise of their own individual selection and approval of what they considered helpful, and condemnation of the harmful?"

"The only conclusion that we can arrive at on the question is that legalized censorship of any kind is likely to be productive of greater evils than it seeks to overcome."

"We note with great satisfaction that the press is beginning to grasp the danger of censorship as far as its own welfare is concerned. We have always pointed out that censorship of motion pictures is an entering wedge for the curtailment of the freedom of expression in general."

The following is an interview with J. A. Berst, vice president and general manager of the Pathe Exchange, Inc. Berst is a pioneer in film production and declares for federal censorship.

"The motion picture companies today need a Federal Board of Censorship to protect themselves," Berst declares. "If we don't decide on a Federal Board, local state boards will mushroom over night to throttle the industry."

"It is not my opinion that the producers need censorship to prevent them from making pictures that would offend public decency or that would tend to corrupt the morals of the young, although, it is true that there are some few unscrupulous men in the business who would stoop to the lowest depths to produce pictures not fit to be shown to any audience because of the lure of quick riches. All of the reputable, responsible producing companies today are conscientiously trying to make the kind of pictures the public wants—and the public will never tolerate indecency. True, mistakes are made, but generally they are honest ones."

"If Congress will pass a bill for a Federal Board of Censorship, it will sound the death knell of the local state boards. Some of these boards will continue for a time, but eventually they will have to go."

"The reason that no progress is being made in the present fight in the case of the State Censorships is that neither the public nor the exhibitors are vitally interested. The public doesn't look upon motion pictures as a necessity. They go to them for amusement, but if all the motion picture theaters were closed, there would be no revolution in the United States. The exhibitors are in sympathy with the fight against the Censorship, but they are not interested enough to cooperate with the manufacturers to the extent necessary to accomplish anything."

MABEL'S AGE

CAST

**Amos Pudgkins, millionaire,
His daughter Mabel, tall and fair.
A villain, Mortimer Dubart,
And Jack, who wins fair Mabel's heart.**

**SUBTITLE:
EACH NATAL DAY THE MILLION-
AIRE
A PENNY GAVE HIS DAUGHTER
FAIR.**

Scene 1.

FANCY drawing room (in four):
F Enter Pudgkins (center door);
Places birthday cake on table;
Adds a penny—enter Mabel.
When the birthday cake is lighted,
She grabs penny—is delighted.
Enter Mortimer Dubart—
(Mustache—scoffs—villain's part)—
Sees the birthday cake on table,
Counts the candles—strides to Mabel,
(Faces camera—look of rage)—
Declares he'll tell the world her age.
Mabel kneels before Dubart—
Pleads (on screen) "OH, HAVE A HEART."
Dubart, with face of grandiloquence,
Replies her fate she can't avoid.
Mabel crosses stage in run—
Eats the candles, one by one.

**SUBTITLE:
LEST THE WORLD SHALL KNOW HOW
MANY
TIMES HER BIRTHDAY'S EARNED A
PENNY,
MABEL HITS UPON A RUSE—
RESOLVES ALL EVIDENCE TO LOSE.**

Scene 2.

STREET scene—Mabel—agitation—
Looks off stage—has inspiration—
Meets a blind man, led by pup,
Puts forty pennies in his cup.

Scene 3.

GARRET—Corner—chair and table,
Enter Dubart—dragging Mabel.
(He gazes in the camera's eye).
She begins to sniff and cry.
While she cuts emotion capers,
Dubart robs her of the papers.
**SUBTITLE:
DUBART, WITH HATE THAT NEVER DIES,
SLAYS MABEL'S DAD WITH POISONED
PIES.**

Scene 4.

OFFICE of a syndicate,
Enter Dubart—with a plate
Filled with poisoned kidney pies.
Pudgkins eats the pies and dies.
Pudgkins on the floor, in fits,
Dubart robs the safe—exits.
**SUBTITLE:
FOR FEAR THE LAW HIS PLANS MAY
BUNGLE,
DUBART LURES HER TO THE JUNGLE.**

Scene 5.

TROPIC jungle scene—at night—
Dubart—Mabel, faint with fright.
Enter tribesmen, armed with spears,
This increases Mabel's fears.

Scene 6.

FLASH of river scene, with Jack,
Leaving boat for jungles track.

End of Reel One.

Scene 7.

BROKER'S office (same as four),
Pudgkins' body on the floor.

Scene 8.

JACK in camp, near bank of stream—
Hist—hist—hist—he hears a scream.

Scene 9.

SET exterior—lonesome church,
Enter sexton—drunken lurch,
Dubart, wearing cloak and mask,
Flies the sexton with a flask.
Near a grave that's newly made,
Dubart slays him with a spade.
(Gives camera look of fiendish glee),
Robs the body of a key.

Scene 10.

MABEL on a leopard's back—
Jungle parts—as enters Jack
(Wearing long-tailed coat and spade).
He kicks the leopard in the slats
(Heroic pose)—then looks around—
Sees poor Mabel on the ground.
She slowly wakes at frantic call,
(Smiles at camera), tell him all.

Scene 11.

BROKER'S office (same as four),
Pudgkins' body on the floor.

Scene 12.

JUNGLE setting, same as eight,
Jack and Mabel—tete-a-tete.
Enter Dubart—taxicab,
Draws a sword—gives Jack a stab.
Though Mabel pleads and begs in vain,
He leaves with Jack in aeroplane.

Scene 13.

RAILROAD track—in distance, train,
Dubart, with Jack in aeroplane,
Descends—binds hero to the rails,
Mabel enters as he sails.
Enter train, with hissing steam,
Mabel sees Jack—utters scream—
(Faces camera)—runs to track—
(Frantic business)—rescues Jack.

End of Reel Two.

**SUBTITLE:
WHEN FOILED IN DASTARD DEEDS, DU-
BART,
ADDS FALSEHOOD TO HIS CRUEL HEART,
AND TRIES BY LIES THE PAIR TO PART.**

Scene 14.

BALLROOM (fancy set in four),
Jack and Dubart near the door.

Mabel passes by in waltz,
Dubart hisses, "She is false."

Scene 15.

DUBART in riding clothes (with whip),
Reads a note with sneering lip.
"Prove them cruel words to me
And though it breaks my heart,
No more the haunts of men I'll see,
No more the city's mart.
Back into the jungle's wild
"I'll play a hermit's part."
Dubart folds note with gleeful glance,
Slaps self for joy on riding pants.

**SUBTITLE:
DUBART TELLS JACK THE PROOFS THEY
SEEK
ARE WHERE THE OLD MILL DAMS THE
CREEK.**

Scene 16.

THE old mill—evening light—
Dubart and Jack ride in—alight;
Then with many a tug and groan,
They pull the mill down, stone by stone.

Scene 17.

BROKER'S office (same as four),
Pudgkins' body on the floor.
Dubart enters—stops at door.
Sees the body—faints some more.
Dubart enters—stealthily traces,
(Shows no reverence for dead).
With key he took from sexton's pocket,
He opens desk—steals Mabel's lock.

Scene 18.

CRIPPLED blind man led by pup,
Enter scene with outstretched cup.
Enter Mortimer Dubart,
Stabs the blind man to the heart.
(Gives the camera fiendish grin),
As he searches cup of tin,
Stows the pennies in his purse,
Exits with a savage curse.

Scene 19.

IT IS midnight at the mill,
Jack is working with a will.
Mabel enters—(looking sad)
Mourning for her poisoned dad.
Dubart enters—walking fast,
(On screen), "I have the proofs at last."
(Faces camera with a curse),
Takes the pennies from his purse.
Jack, with firm and manly grace,
Snaps his thumbs in Dubart's face—
Strides to Mabel's side—and there—

Puts his hand on her fair hair.
Dubart sees they've called his bluff—
Exits—(doing villain stuff).

(Close up) view of mossy boulder,
Mabel's head on Jack's broad shoulder.
End of Reel Three.



"Mabel's head on Jack's broad shoulder."